

Statement of Congressman Scott Tipton

September 19, 2013

General Debate

H.R. 1526, the Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act

Thank you Mr. Chairman. And thank you Chairman Hastings for yielding time on this critical matter. I appreciate the opportunity to have been able to work closely with you on this legislation to address the emergency facing Western Forests.

Over the past decade we have seen an increase of the number of catastrophic wildfires burning in the Western U.S. resulting in the tragic loss of life, significant property damage, loss of critical habitats and pollution of vital watersheds. According to the National Interagency Fire Center there have been over 38,119 different fires in the United States in 2013 alone. The Black Forest Fire which ravaged Colorado in June of this year is believed to be the most destructive fire in Colorado's history and destroyed more than 486 homes with estimated costs in excess of \$85 million. The West Fork Complex fire burned approximately 110,000 acres in Southwest Colorado this summer and the incident commanders in charge of suppression efforts on the fire told me that the behavior of the fire was unprecedented. Because of all of the beetle-killed timber, unnaturally dense forest and dry conditions, the fire has acted in a way that defied computer models.

Unfortunately, this news was made worse last week in my home state, as Colorado was struck with another natural disaster in what many believe was the worst flood in the history of Colorado. Parts of at least 18 different cities and towns in my home state were severely flooded and damage to roads, bridges, homes and other infrastructure is already estimated to exceed a billion dollars. While little could be done to prepare for the staggering rainfall the state received over such a widespread area, in parts of Colorado where fires in recent years stripped the landscape of vegetation, the severity of the flood damage was worsened by intense runoff, erosion and mudslides.

Threats to life and property resulting from wildfire are becoming increasingly costly, and by 2030 the number of acres of forest in Colorado that contain residential housing and commercial development is expected to exceed 2 million acres, representing an enormous potential hazard if fuel reduction projects and other proactive management aren't initiated.

Instead of ramping up forest management efforts and addressing the hazardous conditions of Western forests, the Interior Department has proposed a 48% cut agency-wide for Hazardous Fuels Reduction for 2014 and the Forest Service has proposed reducing this proactive management by 24%. In 2012, the Forest Service spent \$296 million on hazardous fuels treatment nationwide while spending \$1.77 billion on wildfire suppression during that same time.

It is far more efficient and cost effective to proactively manage our forests. I've said it before, but the old adage—an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure—rings especially true when we're talking about reducing the occurrence and severity of wildfire in our forests. Despite this, we've seen a decrease in timber harvesting of 80 percent over the past three decades. It's no coincidence that during this time the severity of fires and number of acres burned has increased

steadily. From 2000-2012, over 90 million acres burned in the U.S.—nearly as many as the previous three decades combined.

The status quo of reactive forest management is not working.

H.R. 1526 is the proactive, commonsense forest management approach we desperately need.

This important legislation will help restore sustainable timber harvesting, create jobs, and provide a reliable source of revenue for rural education and infrastructure.

H.R. 1526 addresses the shortfall in county revenue for schools and critical services caused by lack of timber harvests by requiring the Forest Service to produce at least half of the sustainable annual yield of timber required under law since 1908 and to share 25 percent of those receipts with rural counties. In order to meet this goal while providing for healthy forests, the bill includes the local management framework by directing the Forest Service to prioritize hazardous fuels reduction projects proposed by governors and affected counties and tribes.

To expedite locally based healthy forest projects, this package builds on the positive streamlining procedures implemented under the bipartisan Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA).

I'm pleased to have been able to work with Chairman Hastings and other members of the Resources Committee in crafting this proactive forest management strategy that would take immediate action to address the hazardous conditions of our forests. Time is of the essence and we cannot afford to wait for more fires and more devastation before Congress acts. I urge immediate passage of this legislation and with that Mr. Chairman I yield back.